

Ecosystem Restoration: Goldsborough Creek Diversion and Fish Move



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Goldsborough Creek to be rerouted for dam removal

SHELTON * Starting this week, hundreds of juvenile salmon and resident trout will be in for the ride of their lives on Goldsborough Creek in Mason County.

As a first step toward removing an aging wooden dam that now stands as an obstacle to fish passage, a construction crew will begin channeling the 100-foot wide creek into a corrugate metal pipe, five feet in diameter and 1,700 feet long.

The pipe will be the only route downstream for young, ocean-bound salmon and foraging trout until Goldsborough Dam is removed and the streambed is restored next fall.

"It's similar to the way they move fish past the turbines in hydroelectric dams * except this is a temporary measure," said Brett De Mond, a habitat biologist for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). "Properly designed, a pipe like this can move fish safely downstream while work is underway to remove the dam and restore the creekbed."

WDFW is one of three major partners in the \$4.8 million dam-removal project. Other partners include the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Simpson Timber Co., which currently owns the dam.

A team of WDFW biologists and volunteers will be standing by to rescue any fish that get stranded in shallow pools when the stream is dewatered later this week. Rescued fish will be transported in a tanker truck to nearby Coffee Creek, a tributary of Goldsborough Creek, for release.

"Our goal is to have as little impact on this year class of fish as possible," De Mond said.

In the future, however, the project is expected to be a major boon for area fish stocks, opening up 14 miles of ideal spawning and rearing habitat to salmon and sea-run trout. WDFW estimates that Goldsborough Creek will support thousands more coho salmon, chum salmon, steelhead and cutthroat trout once the dam has been removed.

Jeff Koenings, WDFW director, said he is pleased to see the project * which has been discussed for years * finally get underway.

"Our agency has worked very hard in recent years to protect our native salmon runs through fishing restrictions and modifications in our hatchery programs," he said. "Projects like this address one of the biggest remaining challenges we face in recovering Northwest salmon populations by opening up vital freshwater habitat to spawning and rearing. Goldsborough Creek is a big step forward in that effort."

Additional support for the project has come from the Squaxin Island Tribe, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Southwest Puget Sound Watershed Council, the South Puget Sound Salmon Enhancement Group, the City of Shelton, Mason County and local legislators.

Built in 1921 to supply hydroelectric power to the City of Shelton, Goldsborough Dam was later used to supply water to mills on the city's waterfront. It has not been used for any purpose since 1996 and is in a state of disrepair.

While the dam itself is only 14 feet tall, water flowing over it has eroded the streambed, creating a 32-foot drop that has made the existing fishway inadequate, despite repeated efforts in recent years to improve it.

In the months ahead, a contracting firm working in conjunction with the project partners will dismantle the aging dam, then recontour the streambed to facilitate fish passage. Thirty-two concrete weirs will be installed along the section of the creek where the dam now stands, acting as underwater steps for migrating fish.

Plans call for completing all construction, removing the pipe and rewatering the stream by October, De Mond said.

Adult chinook salmon and other fish returning to spawn next fall before the work is finished will be captured near the mouth of the stream and released above the construction site.

“The pipe should work well to move fish downstream, but won’t provide upstream passage for adults in fall,” De Mond said. “For that, we’ll have to use the truck.”

Sixty-five percent of the \$4.8 million project will be funded by the federal government through the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers under Section 206 of the Water Resource Development Act, which authorizes funding and management for aquatic ecosystem restoration. The Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife, using funds provided through a special legislative appropriation, will provide \$1.1 million for the project, as will Simpson Timber Co.

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